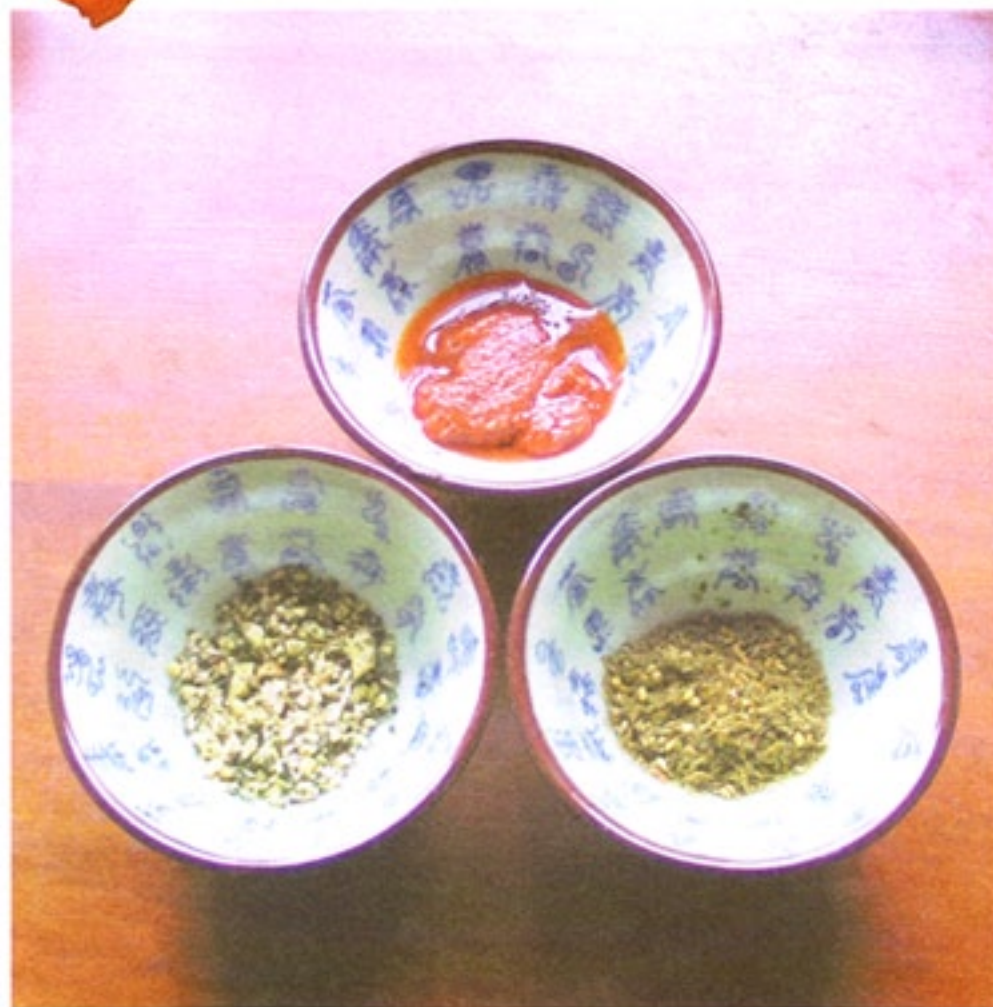


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Spicing it up and raising the heat

by Angela Perez

Combining the best of spice blends hundreds of years old and incorporating some of New Zealand's native herbs and spices to its mixes, Canterbury small business Ground has carved a unique niche in the spice market in New Zealand.

One of the few local spice makers producing Middle Eastern wet and dry spice mixes, Ground's co-director Jenny Garing says her interest in spices began as a weekend hobby, with growing support from family and friends inspiring her to branch out and establish the business in 2004.

"We sort of set ourselves some philosophies right from the beginning and have tried really hard to stick to them. We import the whole

spices, and try to get free-trade and organic, if possible. We're really careful with the quality of them, and roast and hand grind them in mortar and pestle."

Trying to use as fresh and as local ingredients where possible, Ground makes all its own spice blends in the same way they have been made over hundreds of years, hand grinding its products.

This also means the shelf-life of its products can be up to a year, instead of the three months that machine processed spices usually have.

Aiming to have authentic, genuine recipes, many of its spice blends vary hugely between regions in the Middle East, and consequentially

Ground products were thoroughly studied before it went to market.

"We researched, for example, Ras al Hanout and looked at top-shelf ones and then researched about 20 or 30 different recipes and experimented. We made them, tried them, and gave them to friends...until we came up with one that we personally liked that was as close as you could get to the authentic recipe."

Initially starting with 14 different wet and dry spice mixes and pastes, Ground now also sells hard to find spices. It has only been in the last two years that Ground has begun to see success within the hospitality industry and corporate sector. Ground now supplies Emirates and Singapore Airlines and about six restaurants nationwide.

Using many indigenous ingredients, Ground has been able to create one of a kind New Zealand products, like its Pounamu dukkah. It is also currently developing three new products to compliment its range.

With increasing exposure and growing knowledge of spices, Ms Garing says things like red harissa and chermoula are becoming mainstream. And with most domestic kitchens becoming more adventurous, Ms Garing is excited about new directions in cooking.

"We're hoping that in New Zealand the trend continues toward good quality, organic cooking and to use quality, fresh regional and native herbs, and not just commercially available ones."